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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005168

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV SOCI XF JO

SUBJECT: SEPTEMBER 11 ONE YEAR LATER IN JORDAN: SYMPATHY
STILL, BUT DISAPPOINTMENT OVER "LESSONS NOT LEARNED" AND
ANXIETY OVER THE FUTURE

Classified By: CDA Gregory L. Berry. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

Summary

¶11. (C) A year after 9/11, many Jordanians still make a point of expressing sympathy for the victims of the attacks and condemnation for those who carried them out. That said, many also quickly add that the U.S. "failed to learn the lessons of September 11" and has yet to address the perceived "root causes" behind the acts -- i.e. America's "unbalanced" approach in the region. While the local press in recent days has been full of stories marking the 9/11 attacks, most Jordanians are more focused on -- and more anxious about -- the anticipated consequences for Jordan of U.S. military action against Iraq. End Summary.

On A Human Level, Sympathy

¶12. (C) September 11 shocked Jordanians, like others around the world, by its brutality and the scale of devastation it wrought. A year later, many of our contacts still make a point of expressing sympathy for the victims and condemnation for the perpetrators. Former parliamentarian Ra'ad Bakri told us "September 11 is a black day. Those who did it are as far from Islam as possible. Jordanians stand 100 percent with Americans on this sad day." Similarly, journalist Nadia Aloul told us "we don't need an anniversary to remind us of September 11 as we have been living it every day." Conversations with other contacts and with ordinary Jordanians in casual interaction show a similar perception -- September 11 was a tremendous human tragedy and an act against Islam. (Note: at this point, the argument generally turns in one of two directions: either al-Qaeda's world view is a deeply warped interpretation of Islam, or Muslims could not have carried out such an act and someone else was responsible. End Note). Thus, in the human context, Jordanians feel genuine sympathy for America on this anniversary.

Looking Back: America Did Not Learn Its Lessons

¶13. (C) That said, Jordanians continue to view September 11 primarily through the prism of their own immediate concerns. They listen to our counter-arguments patiently, but are likely simply to brush them off. For many of them, September 11 was a consequence of the U.S.'s flawed policies in the region, a relationship the U.S. didn't understand then and still doesn't understand now. Former Parliamentarian Mahmoud Kharabsheh made this point to the A/DCM recently, arguing that "rational, reasonable Arabs don't support what happened on 9/11. But they believe that the reasons given by al-Qaeda are valid bases to oppose U.S. policy." In a September 8 editorial, the English language, government-affiliated, Jordan Times expressed a related idea: "The last year would have been well spent had the U.S. and the international community done more thinking and soul-searching on the root causes of terrorism." And another Embassy contact echoed the same sentiment recently, noting: "people here feel that 9/11 was an historic opportunity for the U.S. to improve its negative image in the Arab world, but the U.S. failed to review its policies." Most here perceive that the U.S. has not addressed "the root causes" of the region's tensions and that it has acquiesced in the face of the IDF's ever more brutal tactics for suppressing the Intifada. They still feel strongly that it is a mistake to equate "legitimate Palestinian martyrdom operations" with 9/11. All of these factors combined have left many here (who are otherwise sympathetic to what befell America a year ago) with a bitter taste.

Looking Ahead: Iraq is the Main Concern Now

¶14. (C) Over the past week, the local press has devoted considerable space to stories and editorials marking the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. As a result, public

consciousness of, and discussion about, 9/11 has risen. That said, most Jordanians' primary concern is focused at home -- not on what happened in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania a year ago, but rather, on what they fear will happen to Jordan and the region in the months ahead. Growing anxiety about the anticipated consequences for Jordan of possible U.S. military action against Iraq looms ever larger. For many ordinary people, America's "failure to learn the lessons of 9/11 and address the root causes" is part of a continuing dynamic leading the region toward an uncertain and anxiety-filled future.

BERRY